

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
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ORAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS**

**MOGAN CULTURAL CENTER
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

LAOTIAN SECRET WAR EXHIBIT

INFORMANT: THONG PHETVIXAY

**INTERVIEWERS: MEHMED ALI, SARAH MORRISON, AND CHAN
PHETVIXAY**

DATE: JANUARY 4, 2008

A = ALI

S = SARAH

C = CHAN

T = THONG

W = THONG'S WIFE

Tape 08.01

A: Okay. So this is interview with Thong Phetvixay on January 4, 2008. And we're conducting this interview at 40 Crescent Street in the Highlands. So thanks for joining us this evening and sharing some time. And on the microphone this evening, on the recording, will be Sarah Morrison, if you want to introduce yourself.

S: I'm Sarah Morrison. I'm an intern for Mehmed Ali at the Mogan Center.

A: And Chan Phetvixay.

C: I'm Chan Phetvixay. I'm also an intern at the Mogan Cultural Center.

A: Good. And what we're doing now is putting our voices on so that the transcriber, she can recognize which, whose voice is which, etc., so. So Thong, first a little background information. Where and when were you born?

T: I was born in Laos. I was born in the countryside, very countryside. I born (--) I was born the first place they start the war. They start first time in my province. In Phongsaly they have two place. One part in Phongsaly they start first over there.

A: Okay. And what we, what we want to do as I'm thinking about this I'm going to interrupt you, what we should do is provide to the transcriber is the written names, (C: Okay) and also a little (--) So to, what was the province called again?

T: Phongsaly and Huaphan.

A: Okay. So at the, on a list of paper you want to write those down and get those, you might have to go check the internet to get the proper kind of spelling, and give those to Janine in kind of order. And you might even put a little phrase next to it like "place where he was born," "place where he got married." You know, "When he first went off to war," and those kind of things. Now what's the exact name of your birth place? Is there a village?

T: I was born in [Ban Jiang], [unclear], Province Jiang. And oh, Province [unclear]. I made a mistake. (A: Okay) I was born in [Jiang], [unclear] Jiang, [unclear] Huaphan. [Unclear], that means Province Huaphan.

A: Okay.

T: I was born in 1953 on April 4. No, April 20.

A: Okay. All right. Great, and what did your parents do for work?

T: My parents, they was working in the farm. They make, grow the rice and they cut the wood and grow the rice. Some they grow the corn for family, (A: Yup) not for market, only family.

A: Okay. So subsistence farming essentially. (T: Yup) And what were your parents' names?

T: My parents' name, my father [Phomasay] Phetvixay, and my mother's name is [Thum] Phetvixay. (A: Okay) My father passed away in 1983.

A: Okay. And your (--) What we want to do is a little family history now. What was your father's parents' names?

T: Oh, my father's parents name I don't know.

A: You don't know any of them?

T: I don't know any of them.

A: Okay, and how about your mother's parents' names?

T: I don't know either, because I was very small, maybe I haven't born yet that they die.

A: Okay. And were they all from the same province, or did they come from somewhere else.

T: They all the same province.

A: Okay. And was your mother born in the same village as you?

T: No. My mother was born in, she told me but I'm not sure. She told me she was born in [Narn Ngum].

A: Okay.

T: The same Province [Huaphan].

A: Okay, and what about your dad?

T: I have no idea about my dad.

A: Okay, very good. And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

T: I have a little small family. I have one brother, only one brother.

A: That's it?

T: Yah.

A: And was that typical for Laos families from that time period?

C: [Translates the question to Thong]

T: No, my mother she, she have big family, but she's bad luck. All the kids die when they were, they just born like two three months, two three years, and they die, (A: Oh!) because the place they live very far from the city. (A: Okay) We have no car. We have no medicine, no doctors. They just use like their own medicine. Like take some from root, from the root and mix together and they use it, but its not help. My mother have nine kids, but have only me and my brother left. (A: Wow) They all die.

A: Did you have electricity where you came from?

T: No, no electricity. No nothing. [All chuckle] Only the wood, they cut the wood and burn the wood. No, no flashlight.

A: Okay. All right. So tell us a little bit about your (--) Did you go to school as a kid?

T: Yes I was.

A: And where did you go to school at?

T: The first time I go to school in my village (A: Okay) from kindergarten to grade one, something like that. And then they start the war. When they start fighting we move place to another, place to another like that. Place to place all year long from 1960 to 1965. I cannot count because too many place. (A: Really) Yah. They fighting here, they broke down, we move to another place. And they fight back, we go back like that. (A: Really) Back and forth, back and forth, life is very dangerous.

A: Hm, and so you weren't really able to go to school during that time?

T: No school at all.

A: No school at all, wow. And tell us the background of why they were fighting as you understand it?

T: I understand why they fighting. I know when my father told me 1953 I was just born, and then the French they went to Laos. That time French covered. Friend, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia depend on French.

A: Right, they were all part of French colonies.

T: Yah, yah, French colony. And then the people on that area they don't like French and they start fighting. (A: Okay) They make small group and then bigger and bigger, bigger, like that.

A: So the fighting originally was against the French?

T: Against French, but Laos depend on French. We have to do everything French needed. (A: Umhm, umhm) We help French, but French not strong enough. [Laughs] They still [lose the war].

A: Now do you, did you ever meet any French people as a kid?

T: No, not at all, because when I born they already out from the country.

A: Okay. All right.

T: I was born in 1953, they were already out.

A: Okay. And so do you have any stories of any warfare when you were a kid?

T: No, I can't remember.

A: Okay.

C: Oh, can I interrupt?

A: Yah, absolutely.

C: [Speaks to Thong in Laos]

T: Oh, I thought you asked me before that. Yah, when I was, when I was young a lot of thing happened Ali.

A: Okay.

T: Myself, my brother, that time my parents very sick and they say, "Go another village, go get medicine" for them. And me and [Sing] left home about fifteen minute, but the place we were going not too far, walk about half hour. (A: Okay) When I left home about fifteen minutes they start fight over there.

A: At the village you were?

T: At the village I was.

A: Or at the village you were going to?

T: No, at my village. The place I was going to, there's nothing. (A: Okay) They start fight over there and we cannot go back. They burn the village, all fire. (A: Really) My dad cannot walk that time, because his feet swell up, something wrong. And they crawl everywhere just to escape fire. Lucky he no die that time. And me and [Sing] we escaped to the freedom side. But the communist side, my parents. (A: Oh!) Me and [Sing] on the freedom side. That time I was eight, nine years old; (A: Wow) my brother maybe six, seven years old. (A: Okay) When they fight me and Sing ran on the field. The communist shoot us too, but lucky we no die. The bullet hit beside like this, [makes sound of shooting bullets], beside me and [Sing]. Yah, the war [chuckling], oh dangerous. And then they use that maybe B40, they shooting us, but not close. Maybe around here to my [unclear] like that.

A: Okay, so maybe a 100 yards or something?

T: Yes, around 100 yards. Then when explode we don't see each other [laughs]. And then a little bit [wake up] we see us run again.

A: You didn't see your brother at first when the explosion happened?

T: No, no, no, nothing. Like [makes sound] don't know nothing, but nobody hit. Lucky.

A: Yah, and that was the same time?

T: The same time we escape from the fire.

A: From the village?

T: Yah.

A: And so was it the American plains bombing?

T: No, they'd start fight and they shoot. (A: Okay) They use B40. You know B40? Like this?

A: Oh okay. So a B40 is also the name for a plane. It wasn't a plane.

T: No, no plane. No plane.

A: So what's a B (--)

T: They have bomb like this, and the, they have bomb on the, they use like (--)

A: So like a rocket propelled grenade?

T: Yah, it looked like a rocket, they call B40.

A: B40, okay. And who made those? Was it the Soviets?

T: Soviets.

A: Okay, okay.

T: You see in Iran a lot. [Laughs] Yah.

A: Okay, so what happened after you were separated from your parents that day?

T: After we separate from the parents (--)

A: And I'm sorry, was there anybody else walking with you at that time?

T: No, only me and my brother, only two people. They all people go in there. They make a hole to hide the bullet. They go all in there. Only me and [Sing] run away [chuckles] on the field, the rice field.

A: Okay. So what happened after you got away from the village?

T: After we escaped from those we live on the freedom side. And my parents live on the communist, with communist about two months, three months. My brother cry every single day, they miss parents because too little. And after that the soldier there, they feel

very sad and they, “Oh, I bring you back.” And the soldier bring us back to the parents. (A: Really) Yah, tried to escape from where they put the mines.

A: They put mines?

T: Ooh a lot of mines! (A: Okay) The soldier bring me and [Sing]. “Oh, don’t go that way, mine in there. Don’t come this way, mine in there.” And they bring us until get to the village, the parents, where my parents live. (A: Okay) Because very small.

A: Yah. And nobody shot at you guys that time?

T: No. No, because they don’t see. Nobody see.

A: Did you go night time?

T: No in the day, but soldier bring over there.

A: Okay. And how was your (--) What kind of feelings did you have when you finally got to see your parents?

T: Oh, very happy. And a lot communist soldier, they come to interview.

A: Interview you guys?

T: Yes.

A: What did they ask?

T: They ask where’s the opposite side? Where they live? Where, what they do? They ask like that. But most people tell me and [Sing] before we go to the parents, they say “Don’t, don’t know, don’t see.” Just two words, “Don’t know, don’t see.” [All laugh] Just keep two word in there, two three word in there. “I don’t see them, I don’t know them, I escape from them.” After that they don’t ask. [All laugh]

A: Wow. And you were around nine years old?

T: Yah, I was around nine years old, and my brother around six or seven years old. (A: Wow) Very small.

A: So when you lived on the communist side was it different?

T: Yes, different.

A: In what ways?

T: The communist side usually, that time they just want, who is the boy they want to be a soldier for them. Every day, every single day they go ask parents they want, usually they want me because I'm bigger. They want me to be a soldier with them.

A: Even at age nine?

T: Yah, eight, nine, ten, whatever, they take.

A: Okay. And what did your parents say to them?

T: They just keep saying no, too small. And then I think 1961, or 1962 the Americans plane, they go drop the bomb over there. (A: Okay) In 1962 I think.

A: Okay. And tell us about that experience? What happened when the Americans came?

T: When American, they drop the bomb over there, after that the people they try to escape from the village, because when they see the people in the village they don't care, a soldier or not soldier, they just drop that time.

A: They just dropped the bomb.

T: Yah, because soldiers and what they call civilians? (A: Civilians?) Yah, they live together. (A: Okay) After that we moved to [unclear] too. Go everywhere. After that we tried to escape from communist. (A: Okay) Escape at night. (A: Okay) No fight, but we tried to escape by ourselves.

A: And so what happened?

T: At that time they didn't see. We just escaped from the village to the freedom side, because that time we stayed on the line. Yah, this side communist, this side freedom, this fight. We just escaped from this side to another side, only one day and one night we escaped from communist.

A: You walked?

T: Yah, walked.

A: And what year was that?

T: 1962.

A: Okay, so the same year as the (--)

T: The same year, yah.

A: The bombs were being dropped. (T: Yah) Now tell us about the bombs, and what your recollections are specifically. Do you remember the first time? Had you seen planes before?

T: Yah, the first time. I never seen planes, the fighting planes like that. The plane look like they use on the fight with Japanese. Look like that.

A: Okay, yup. And so do you remember the day when they first came? What did you think?

T: I can't remember the day, but I remember when they drop. I still stand at the temple, beside the temple and look. [All laugh] I couldn't see many time, but I don't, I didn't know. Oh maybe he didn't hear me, we died, but I don't know. I just stand and look the [soot].

A: Yah, did anybody tell you "Get out of the way?"

T: My father. "Go in there, go in the hole."

A: So where did you guys hide when the bombing came?

T: No plan Ali, because everyone still working, or something like that. Just see the planes coming and they shoot (A: Really) that day.

A: And nowhere to run?

T: No, cannot run. Nowhere to run.

A: Was there a lot of people killed with the bombing?

T: No, not too many people. (A: And how many (--)) I know Ali, my father sister's son-in-law, he died. (A: Okay) The bomb explode and hit his neck, cut, that day.

A: So do you think the bombing was affective?

T: To the communist? (A: Yah) No, at that time not really, because (--)

A: Do you think the communist used, used that against the people, like to encourage them to fight with the communist because of the bombs?

C: Can you say that again Ali?

A: What I'm saying is, I'm asking when the Americans started bombing were the communist able to use that as like propaganda to help their own cause with the common people?

C: [Translates question to Thong]

T: Yah, they use a lot. They like criticizing us. (A: Okay) “Oh, American like that no good, they eat people like that.” They say that.

S: Eat people?

T: They say that, but no eat. [Laughs]

S: That’s pretty wild.

T: They say, “American people, long nose, look like” what they call [pineat].

C: Giant.

T: Giant, yah.

A: Really.

T: Yah, yah, they say that. They just scare the people, let the people don’t believe us.

A: Okay. What’s the Laos word for giant?

C: [Pineat]

A: [Pineat]? Okay.

T: Pineat, yah.

A: So after you escaped over to the other side, what did your folks do? And during this time you just continued to work and make rice, and farm?

T: No. No. After we escape from the communist side to the freedom side, the UN, they helped.

A: The United Nations?

T: United Nations helped, (A: Okay) because we live here, we don’t have rice, we don’t have nothing. Clothes, or blankets, or anything, we don’t have nothing. That’s the United Nations helped.

A: Okay.

T: They give rice, they give blankets, food, everything!

A: Now the village that you were at when they were bombing, what was the name of that village?

T: [Ban Jiang]

A: Okay, and when you escaped you went to where?

T: After I escaped from [Ban Jiang], too many place Ali. After Ban Jiang I went to [unclear]. After [unclear] I went to [unclear]. After [unclear] I went to [Muang Kham]. [Muang Kham] maybe some American people they know, because that place big like an airport.

A: Airbase?

T: Air base. Not like (--)

A: Was it military?

T: No.

A: Just an airport.

T: Just an airport. (A: Okay) And then after we escaped from those place to [Muang Kham], after that the UN they helped. They bring the people to [unclear] by plane. C23. (A: Okay) C123, or?

A: I forget, yah. [T: Unclear]. Yah. So you folks got on the plane?

T: Yah, after that get on the plane.

A: Now were you living in a camp?

T: Yah, little like the camp, but not the camp.

A: Not a refugee camp.

T: Not like a refugee camp. (A: No.) Like refugee, they live by the group. Some group they go back, some group they come over here, something like that.

A: Okay. And so how long before, when you, between the time when you first left the communist village to the time you got on the plane?

T: Around years. One year.

A: One year, (T: Yah) okay. And where did you go when they took you on the plane?

T: After they, we get on the plane we came to [Sum Thong]. (A: Okay) [Sum Thong] like a freedom place. (A: Okay) And then I was stay there around a couple of days, and then I continued to fly to [unclear]. And then after [unclear] we came to [Van Vieng]. [Van Vieng], big airport too. After [Van Vieng] we, after [Van Vieng], his name is [Phom Pakounkum], they take the bus and bring all the refugee to Tallat.

A: Okay, this a person that did this?

T: Yah, this is the top like I don't know, look like governor or something.

A: Okay.

T: It's not governor, but they have like [pounamum].

C: Prime Minister?

T: No.

Wife: Look like governor.

T: Yah, they look like that but it's not. (A: Okay) They use the bus to carry all the refugee to Tallat.

A: And the guy that was the governor, his name was [Phom Pakounkum]?

T: [Phom, Phom Pakounkum]

A: [Phom Pakounkum], okay. And where did you guys go on the buses?

T: We came from Vang Vieng to Tallat by the bus.

A: Okay, and how many people were on these buses?

T: Ooh, maybe around thirty.

A: Okay, and were they all from your same group?

T: Yah, from the same group, from his own village. That guy born in the same province that I was born.

A: Oh okay. All right.

T: Yah, this is the leader.

A: Okay. So was it because you guys came from the same area is how you got on the bus?

T: Yah.

A: There was other people that didn't get to go on the bus?

T: There are some other people, not the same place, but we come from the same refugee.

A: Yah, do you understand what I'm trying to ask?

C: What is it?

A: What I'm saying is, was the reason they got on the bus because they came from that guy's village, and other people didn't get to go on the bus because they came from a different village?

C: [Repeats question in Laos to Thong and replies in English for him]. Oh, so it doesn't matter like if they're from his village or not.

A: Okay, he was taking people on the bus.

C: Yah,

T: He was taking all of the refugees.

A: Okay. And so you went to Tallat? (T: Yah) And what happened then?

T: We went to Tallat and just build the village in there. (A: Okay) They put a new name, new village, [Phou Kokum].

A: Oh, named for him?

T: For him. He made that village, [Phou Kokum]. Until now they still have it.

A: And what's the name for village? Is it Phou?

T: Phou. (A: Phou) [Phou Kokum]

A: Okay.

T: [Laughs] It's hard. We lived in there since 1964.

A: Okay, and what did you do there? How old were you by this time? You were (--)

T: By this time I was like fifteen years old. (A: Okay) Fifteen, but I had school.

A: Okay. And so that's the first time you went back to school?

T: Yes.

A: And how was your education during that whole time?

T: Oh, that time I was learning good Ali, yah, me and my brother learning good. I was on grade, third grade or fourth grade, something like that.

A: Okay. And how long did your family stay there, for awhile?

T: Until I escaped from Laos, ran out. (A: Okay) Since 1964 until 1984 (Wife: '84) I escape from communist.

A: So the Laos, what was the name of the communist party in Laos?

T: I don't know Ali. They just call communist.

A: Yah, but Pathet, right?

C: Yah, Pathet Laos. [Unclear], communist Pathet Laos.

T: Communist Pathet Laos.

A: And so in the ten years or so that you stayed, you stayed at Tallat? (T: Umhm) And then the communist took over. (T: Yah) What happened in that ten year period?

T: During ten years I live in there just like we just make rice, corn, everything to serve for family.

A: Yah, and you went to school.

T: Yah, we went to school.

A: And did you meet your wife at that time?

T: I met her when I was finish school. (A: Okay) I was learning in the (--) In Laos they have like a [two] program for teachers. The first one two-years, like a hot, hot school. (Laughs) Like it's only two year, like (--)

A: Fast paced school?

T: Yah. Two years and another one for four years. (A: Okay) I just finished for two years teacher school, and then I was teaching in the village and I met her that time.

A: Oh, okay. So what village were you teaching at?

T: A couple of village around there.

A: Okay. And where did you guys meet though, which village?

T: On her place, [Banamput].

A: Okay. So tell us a little bit about what you thought when you first saw him?

[All laugh]

C: Traditional.

[Thong and wife are conversing in Laos]

C: She's blushing. [All laugh]

A: So you were a teacher when you became an adult. (T: Yes) And you just teach regular kids? Any special courses, or you teach arithmetic, or alphabet, or history, or?

T: Look like a general subject (A: Okay) from everything, but not like (--) Look like kindergarten over here, we teaching everything, (A: Okay) but I have to two-times back and forth Ali.

A: Okay.

T: After I was teaching over here a little bit, and then I went back to full-time again. That time I was stay on line with the communist again. [Laughs]

A: Oh you were right on the line again? (T: Yah) Now as time went on the line, the communist area got bigger?

T: Yah, very strong that time.

A: Okay. And how do you think they were getting more powerful?

T: Usually they get power from North Vietnam and China. (A: Okay) A lot of soldiers from China and Vietnam.

A: Came into Laos?

T: Came into Laos.

A: And what did they do?

T: They just came to fight.

A: They were fighting?

T: Yah.

A: They weren't just teaching Laos?

T: No.

A: They were fighting.

T: They come to fight.

A: Really.

T: They have (--) We can tell soldier from Thai, Thailand. They wear like a [soft] pant.

(A: Okay) Look like [speaks to Chan in Laos].

C: Cargo shorts. [Speaks to Thong in Laos] Yah, Cargo shorts.

A: Okay. And what about the Laos communist, how were they dressed?

C: Laos communist they dress like regular. Like white hat (A: Okay) and the shirt and the pant look like brown, not like brown. Almost look like this?

A: Okay, so maybe like tan? Tan color?

T: Yah, it look like tan, tan color.

A: And full length, or shorts?

T: Yah, full length. Full length.

A: Full length. (T: Yah) And the Chinese wore shorts. (T: Shorts) Now did the Chinese have like Laos signature or anything?

T: No. (A: No.) No.

A: And do you think they spoke Laos? (T: No) They just come over there.

T: Yah, like North Vietnamese too, they never speak Laos, just speak their own language.

A: So how many years did you end up teaching?

T: I was teaching about from 1973 to 1980. And then I was, from '73 to '80, and that time I was teaching I was soldier at the same time Ali. (A: The same time?) Yah, carry a gun, go to school, the bomb.

A: Really, the grenades?

T: Yah. Yah, grenades.

A: Okay. So when, how old were you when they finally put you in the army?

T: That time I was like twenty-two, twenty-three.

A: Okay, and what did they do? Did they come and talk to you? Did they ask you?

T: No. This side, or communist side?

A: Did you, were you a soldier on both sides?

T: No, the freedom, freedom side.

A: Yah. I mean how did you end up becoming a soldier?

T: They not ask, but we had to because we are on the freedom side. We have to do like the freedom side.

A: Okay.

T: If the communist see, sometime they kill too. (A: Really?) Yah.

A: Okay. And so did you have to sign paperwork? (T: No) Did you get trained? (T: No) Well how did (--)

T: No training, no nothing.

A: Well how did you become a soldier then?

T: Just like a regular.

A: Did they just give you a rifle? (T: Yah) And say, "You're now a soldier"?

T: Not like a [unclear] soldier, like a, we protect ourselves.

A: Okay. Okay. So you don't have a uniform?

T: No, no uniform. (A: Okay) Uniform as teachers, (A: Oh really) but we act like soldier. [Laughs]

A: Yah. Now did you ever go and fight in a battle? (T: No, no.) And did, did you ever have to shoot the gun?

T: No. If we fight at that time, but I had no fight. (A: Okay) Lucky.

A: Yah. Did (--) What about the bomb, the bombings? Anymore bombings?

T: That time they have a lot, but I wasn't there. I was just out from Laos to the safety side, (A: Okay) safety place.

A: What about the American planes? They still come to bomb?

T: Yup. That time we have like a F14, or something. (A: Yah. And they dropped the) And B52, they drop the bomb a lot!

A: Near where you were living?

T: No, in my own place, the place I was born. (A: Okay) And people die a lot too. (A: Really?) Yah.

A: Did you lose any family or friends there?

T: No, my cousins all come to freedom side, (A: Okay) because my father, they don't like communist. [Laughs]

A: Really, why is that?

T: My father, they don't (--) Because they know communist no good. That's why they try to escape from them.

A: Was your father a soldier or anything?

T: He was a little bit, but not too long. He was French soldier.

A: During World War II maybe?

T: Yah, maybe World War II.

A: Yah. So what happened when the communist finally took over? Did they come to your area?

T: They just signed a document with the Laos government.

A: Okay, and what happened?

T: And then they talked, they talked, and then they say, "Oh no, no, no can do nothing." They just talk, try to make the soldier together, and then they changed the document. They don't care. After that the people who, they don't like communist, just escape to Thailand.

A: Really? (T: Yah) Okay. Did they arrest a lot of people?

T: Yup, they, like the top, the top one. (A: Okay) They arrest them and put them in the [Seminok] Camp in [unclear]. Some people die over there a lot. (A: Really) Like the king of Laos die over there too. They arrest the king and put over there. I don't know when the king, the king die, but he die over there in the [Seminok] Camp.

A: Okay. So when did you decide you were going to leave Laos?

T: 1984.

A: Okay. And why did you decide to leave?

T: I decide to leave Laos because I tried to escape from communist since I was small, [All chuckle], but I can't. They follow all the time, they catch me. They communist no good. Everything, like you work in the farm, you get something, you have to share with them without price. No price, no nothing. We have to help. (A: Yah) You have small, you have to help small. You have big, you have to help big, but no, no cost no nothing. They take free. If you don't do it, they say something to you, sometime they arrest you.

A: So was there one thing that made you really decide that you wanted to leave?

T: I decide to leave communist because I know I want to grow my family. I want all my kids to have education. I want all my kids to have a good job. And I don't want somebody like forcing every time like before. That's why I try to escape from them. I decide to escape from communist.

A: Okay. And you left in '84. Where were you living in '84?

T: Tallat.

A: Okay, and by this time you had your family?

T: Yup, I was married with her in 1974.

A: Okay. And how about the kids? When were the kids born?

T: We have [May] on 1975.

C: Yah, [May] 1975.

T: And [Lai], 1977. Every other two years.

A: Okay. And then [Pon] in '79?

C & T: Pon in 1979.

T: And [Pun] '81. Chan is '84.

A: Okay. And so you were (--) Where was Chan born?

T: She was born in Tallat.

A: Okay, so you left. Where did you go when you started to leave Laos?

T: We just (--) When I start to leave Laos we just escaped from Tallat by the car (A: The car?) to Vientiane, the Capital of Laos. (A: Yup) And we live in there about one night, two nights.

Wife: [Disagrees – speaks in Laos]

T: One week? Because my brother (--)

A: One week you said?

T: Yah. My brother send money to somebody over there and pay somebody over there, try to bring the whole family here.

A: Okay. And you were in Vientiane.

T: I was in Vientiane about, [Wife: One week] for one week, yes.

A: Okay, and what did you do after that? Where did you go?

T: After that the guy my brother pay, very smart. He tried to make like, I don't know. [Speaks to Chan in Laos]

C: Like a letter or a document.

T: Yah, it look like a document from the government, "Let this family go visit his cousin over there."

A: In, in another part of Laos?

T: Yah, (A: Okay) because we tried to cross the Mekong River in [Tha Khaek]. And that guy make the letters, "Let this family and that family go visit his cousin on that place." (A: Okay) And they made like what they call?

C: Like a fake stamp, or something.

T: Fake stamp, stamp it from Laos Government.

A: Okay.

T: And the police on the way, they see. "Oh go!" Too many place they check everyone.

A: Really? They kept on checking it? (T: Yah) Okay.

T: Some place we had to get out of the car right, and they check. "Oh, go." And then we go to the, beside the Mekong River. And some people were there. They pay, they get money and they use the boat, (A: Okay) bring us to Thailand.

A: Okay. So where exactly did you leave Laos? In Vientiane, or somewhere in the countryside?

T: I stay in Vientiane one week after I escape from Tallat. I stayed there one week, and we get into the car from Vientiane to [Tha Khaet]. (A: Tha Khaet) One day!

A: Oh it takes one day to drive?

T: One day, yah.

A: Okay. And then from there you have a boat.

T: Yah, after that we have boat across the Mekong River.

A: How big was the boat?

T: The boat, not like really big. They can carry only fifteen people. (A: Okay) Fifteen people sit like this, the water is going in.

A: What do you mean?

T: The boat not (--)

Wife: Small boat.

T: Small boat.

Wife: A lot of people.

A: Oh really, and it was sinking down?

T: Yah.

A: And some water came in?

Wife: Yah.

A: Wow! Were you scared?

T: No, not, the water not came in. Just like this water not go in. Like [speaks in Laos].

C: [Translates] Oh, like since there were so many people it's only like about like this much you know, (A: Above the water line?) above the water.

A: So maybe an inch. The whole boat was just an inch.

T: Yah, about two inch. [All laugh] Oh!

A: And so how long did it take you to go across the river?

T: Across the river maybe about ten minutes.

A: Oh okay, so a short trip.

T: Short trip. Not motor with.

A: You have to row?

T: Row, yah.

A: Wow. And when you got to the other side what was there?

T: Oh we get to Thailand in the [NaPou] Camp.

A: Okay. So they had a camp right across the river?

T: Yah, they had a camp there. They already have camp.

Wife: [Speaks in Laos]

T: After we have crossed the Mekong River we walk about half hour and we saw the, like a shed for the rice farm. We sleep in there about three, four hours. (Wife: Umhm, the next morning) The sun rise and we came into [Nakun Phnom].

A: So when you took the boat it was at nighttime?

T: At nighttime.

A: Were you scared?

T: Yah, very scared the boat sink. [Laughs]

Wife: Chan cry!

T: Only eight months Ali.

A: Okay, wow. Well I think we're going to finish up today, and maybe come back and finish it up again with your trip from the camp to Lowell, Massachusetts.

T: Okay.

A: Okay? So thanks a lot for your time today.

C: Thank you mom and dad!

S: Thank you.

T: Thank you very much.

Wife: Thank you.

T: I have to look at my newspaper again. They interview me one time already.

A: Oh really?

S: Oh really?

A: Good.

Interview ends.